

Chapter 30 For Freedom's Sake

Two Killed In Highway Accident

A two-car crash on U. S. 40 about five miles south of [Greenwood] accounted for the death of two Negro women Tuesday night. The Mississippi Highway Patrol said Birda [sic] Clark Kegler [sic], 57, of Charleston and Adlema Amlett [sic] of Scobey, were killed in the accident. Admitted to the Greenwood Leflore Hospital for treatment of injuries were Brown Lee Bruce, Jr., of Sidon, who was alone in one of the automobiles, and Jesse J. Brewer and Grafton Gray, Negroes, and Richard L. Simpson 27, white, of Mass., occupants of the other car. No other details of the accident are available at this time, authorities said.ⁱ

The first black person to vote in Tallahatchie County since Reconstruction and her best friend, Birdia Keglar and Adlena Hamlett, were killed on their way home from a civil rights meeting in Jackson on January 11, 1966. Their deaths unofficially resulted from an auto accident, yet no reports exist – most likely never existed – and many questions remain.

Trying to discover what happened to Mrs. Keglar, Mrs. Hamlett and the others who were injured that evening requires going back at least to the fall of 1965, when the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) opened hearings that would last from October 19, 1965 through February 1966 in Washington, D. C. on the activities of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.ⁱⁱ

Of all congressional committees, why had HUAC, known for its red-baiting and conservative nature, suddenly decided to investigate the Klan in the first place? And how might this relate to these two Mississippi deaths?

HUAC's shift to focus on the Klan suddenly occurred after the Alabama shooting of a white woman, a Michigan volunteer who was shuttling demonstrators from Montgomery back to Selma. A volley of bullets fired from a passing car killed Viola Liuzzo, the mother of a five-year-old.

President Johnson took an intense interest in the murder and within 24 hours of her death, with FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover at his side, Johnson announced the arrest of four suspects, all members of the Ku Klux Klan.ⁱⁱⁱ

Johnson praised the FBI for their efficient work and then urged Congress to mount a full-scale investigation of Klan activities; immediately HUAC accepted this task. Johnson did not explain that the crime was solved so quickly because one of the arrested Klansmen, Gary Rowe, was also a paid FBI informer.^{iv}

Edwin E. Willis, the House subcommittee chair, released a statement on November 9, 1965, outlining overall findings, once the Klan hearings had gone on for twelve days with testimony from 52 witnesses: There were “about a dozen different Klan organizations operating [at that time]” with “considerably greater” strength than was estimated. Instead of a total Klan membership of 10,000, the committee estimated “four to five times that number.” The report stated:

Klans make extensive use of innocent-sounding cover or front names – such as civic, improvement or rescue societies and hunting, fishing or sportsmen’s clubs – to conceal the existence of their Klaverns and bank accounts, and that this device has been sufficiently effective to deceive a Federal agency into innocently renting office space in a Klan-owned building.... Klan members and officers speak about burning schools which integrated and setting off intense fires in automobiles and department stores.^v

Secret Klan organizations known by such names as the Vigilantes or Black Knights, the Underground, and the White Band were formed by Klan members for carrying out acts of violence and terrorism, according to HUAC’s report. Willis and his committee also learned of a “small minority” of law enforcement officers who were Klan members.^{vi}

As the HUAC hearings turned their focus to testimony specifically on Mississippi’s Klansmen, three deaths of civil rights activists transpired in the first two weeks of January 1966, a time of renewed Klan violence. The first killing received international coverage while the other two murders that occurred in the Delta’s rural Leflore County barely made state news.

Vernon Dahmer, 58, was fatally injured in a nightriders firebomb attack on his Hattiesburg home the night of January 11, after leading a voter registration drive. Dahmer’s store and home were both destroyed when he allowed blacks to pay the \$2 poll tax necessary for voting in his store.

Dahmer, the past president of the Hattiesburg NAACP, died of shock from burns the next afternoon; his respiratory tract seared from inhaling so much fire and smoke.^{vii} Dahmer’s wife and 10-year-old daughter also were burned; the child was hospitalized in fair condition.^{viii} Members of NAACP, SNCC and others attending a meeting in Edwards, in the outskirts of Jackson, quickly took off in the early morning hours for Hattiesburg after hearing the news.

Three deaths in Leflore County

Several hundred miles away from Hattiesburg in the early evening hours of January 12, 1966, two women from Tallahatchie County were killed and three passengers injured, two of them seriously, after their car left the road near the small town of Sidon, south of Greenwood in Leflore County.

Birdia Keglär was found decapitated according to Keglär family members and friends. Adlena Hamlett also was decapitated and her arms were severed from her body, her granddaughter said, and a friend confirmed.^{ix}

All were returning home from a special and secret subcommittee meeting on discrimination and poverty in the Delta headed by Senator Robert F. Kennedy when their car left the road.^x While Kennedy was in Mississippi to take testimony on poverty, he wanted to follow up with these voting activists, after meeting with them earlier in October.

A few months before the fatal incident, Mrs. Hamlett was hanged in effigy in Charleston after receiving warnings of more “serious consequences” if she continued to push for voting rights said her granddaughter, Nina Black Zachary who was living in Minnesota at the time and who

corresponded with her grandmother. Hamlett had testified for the Congressional Record on voting problems in her county. “I believe that Birdia Keglär was hanged in effigy, too,” Zachary said.

WHEN ALMA CHISM of Memphis, Keglär’s granddaughter, attended her grandmother’s funeral in Charleston she also visited Sidon, searching out for clues. “I talked to some people who lived in Sidon and learned the other car came straight at them, crossing over the line. The other driver was not hurt. It was obvious to me – and to the witnesses – they had been run off the road.”

Her story compares closely to information collected independently by Zachary about the incident. The wife of her cousin Alonzo McKinley of Grenada told Zachary the other vehicle – “a sugar truck” – had stopped and the two women were taken from their car to the edge of the woods by two white men where they were tortured and then killed and mutilated. She was also told that Grafton Gray pretended to be dead, an act which likely saved his life.

This was not the first time Gray was forced off the road he told others, including his wife.^{xi} “We were married after this accident and he would not tell me anything about it,” said Mrs. Gray, his second wife and widow. “I could tell that he was still afraid to talk. He had told me about other times Klansmen tried to run him off the road, but he would say nothing about this incident.”

Robert Keglär also could not shake out details of his mother’s death from Gray or from the county sheriff or any public officials. A highway patrol officer threatened him to stay away from the accident site that night, but Keglär sneaked out to Sidon anyway and spoke with several witnesses.

“All I saw were some people there [in Sidon] talking about the wreck. It was near a bridge and they were saying that something didn’t look right.” Don Whitten, Tallahatchie County Prosecutor, visited Birdia’s son at home that night. “He asked me permission for something, I just don’t remember what. But he asked me to sign a paper and I did.” Further, Keglär never collected the life insurance his mother carried. “The company would not pay me and they would never say why.”

Three months later in April, Birdia Keglär’s youngest son James Eddie “Sonny Boy” Keglär died unconscious in a suspicious fire in his home. James also had been trying to learn what happened to his mother.

“James was a lot like my dad. He would drink too much. But he never committed any crimes,” Robert Keglär said. That weekend, James Keglär had called his brother from jail after being arrested for car theft – “something he would never do,” Robert Keglär said. “He was scared.”

James asked his Robert to call the FBI in Clarksdale, “... and I did, but no one came to see him,” Robert Keglär said.

“James got out of jail and went straight on to a house party. Early that Sunday morning at about 6 a.m., the police came to my house and said that James was dead. They would not tell me what happened to him. Later, I was told that he was murdered by a hired killer.”

Chism, Jame’s Keglär’s daughter, also investigated her father’s death. “I know that he was hit on the head before the fire was started. I know his death was no accident. He was trying to get answers and had even gone to Washington, D.C. about my grandmother’s murder. However, I never knew

whom he talked to in Washington. It might have been someone in the Justice Department. I just don't know.”^{xiii}

Richard L. Simpson, 27, of Massachusetts, a white SNCC volunteer who was reported as seriously injured, was not allowed any black visitors in the Greenwood hospital.^{xiii} “We tried to visit him to find out what happened, but the hospital did not treat black people and would not let us into the hospital. They were very rude and would not even tell us if he was okay. I don't know what ever happened to him,” Keglär said. Simpson was a voting rights volunteer who had worked in Belzoni the summer before, civil rights leader Owen Brooks confirmed.

Chism believes Simpson was taken out of Mississippi and sent home as soon as possible. “That would have been the only way to keep anyone safe in those days.”

Grafton Gray was treated at the Mound Bayou hospital. Gray suffered emotionally afterwards and was never the same, according to Gwen Daily, his great niece. Her father remained suspicious of what happened to Gray and to the others who were injured or killed, she said.

My great-uncle received underhanded threats while in the hospital to keep quiet about what happened, my father learned. Employees and visitors would come into his room and tell him to ‘be careful,’ but not in a caring way. When he came home, the threats continued. He would go out into the fields by his house and stand, gazing away. He rarely talked. Even my own father became far more cautious with his own children, and he watched Uncle Grafton like a hawk. Mr. Brewer^{xiv} was injured too, and he was never the same. His reaction was the same as my great-uncle’s.^{xv}

Brown Lee Bruce, Jr., the reported driver of the second car, was not injured, Chism believes. “I’m sure his family could put on all kinds of pressure to keep anything from happening to him.”^{xvi}

No reports of the incident were available from the Tallahatchie or Leflore county sheriff’s departments, and no information was available through the state highway patrol. When asked about this incident in 2004, a spokesperson for the state department of safety maintained too many years passed for records to be available. He did ask a clerk to search but nothing was found.

DAILEY ALSO SAID THAT Birdia Keglär was anticipating the secret Jackson meeting with some excitement. “Senator Robert Kennedy’s committee was coming to Jackson to meet with a small group of people who had met with him before. They were not to tell anyone about this meeting, but Birdia, I’m afraid, may have let it slip out. [Senator Kennedy’s first official state visit came later in March when he spoke on the campus of the University of Mississippi.]

“She was excited about the meeting and would come over to our house with different suits and dresses on, asking which she should wear. The fact of the meeting and the route they took somehow got out and the Klan knew where to find them. Birdia had passed some notes about times and routes to people she thought she could trust.”

REV. EDWIN KING, who knew Keglar, was in Hattiesburg when both women were killed. The long-time state civil rights leader remembered hearing about Keglar's death but little else. "We all assumed it was a car accident," he said.^{xvii}

No one from outside of the Delta came to Keglar's funeral that Lucy Boyd could recall. "This really hurt. We needed them in the worst way. This was the 'Free State of Tallahatchie' and it was a terribly frightening place to be. None of us, even Birdia's son, could dig around, and find out what really happened. We could have used some outside help."

"None of us could learn much of anything about what happened since we were not allowed to see the car – a 1965 Plymouth Fury II – and we were too afraid to push the matter.... No one ever returned the brief case that held all of Birdia's records. Somehow, it disappeared along with the car. The rumor was that deputies or patrolmen pulled it away."

Boyd remembered hearing – "and I don't remember where this came from – that a patrolman had shined a flashlight in their faces when they were inside the car, and said "These are the sons of bitches we're looking for."^{xviii}

CHARLES SUDDUTH, A NATIVE Mississippian who has studied and written about Klan murders, confirmed that decapitation and a cleanly severed arm could be taken as strong evidence of the Klan's involvement in Keglar and Hamlet's deaths. "Klansmen were different in their murders than others. They weren't afraid of the law, since many lawmen were Klansmen. They didn't run away from the crime scene but felt comfortable in staying around for a while. They also were known for torture and for mutilating the body."^{xix}

Rev. Willie Blue, a SNCC member who worked in the Greenwood SNCC office and knew Keglar well, said that he never believed her death was an accident; Keglar "had to have been murdered." "Birdia was brave, but she also lived in fear of the sheriff and others after she won her voter registration rights in 1961. That made the sheriff and the others really angry with her – more than ever."

Reverend Blue tells the story of scaring Birdia once when she was at work:

I was driving to Charleston and outside of town a car with Klansmen started following me. I was scared but I drove on into Charleston and to Birdia's office at the funeral home. When I walked in and told her what happened, she was terrified and asked me why I had come there. She was afraid I had led a trail to her." Blue also confirmed that Keglar was found decapitated.

We all knew this was no accident. She was in the front seat with Grafton driving and he was injured but not killed. Everyone around here knew that Birdia was murdered but they would not talk about it. They were all fearful of what could happen to them and their families. There were no police or deputies who would have taken this seriously, anyway – that the Klan murdered her.^{xx}

Klan shootings and murders were not unusual in Tallahatchie and Leflore counties, Blue continued. “In fact they had picked up in the last two years, from 1964 to 1966.” An earlier shooting took place in Greenwood “right in front of me” when three Klansmen drove up where he and Silas McGhee, also a SNCC volunteer, were working outside of the Greenwood SNCC office.

“It was raining and we were waiting for it to stop. A car came up with three men, one of them was Byron de la Beckwith – he was still running loose. They shot McGhee, right out in the open. But no one was going to listen to us, especially the sheriff.” McGhee was injured but not killed in the accident.^{xxi}

Both Robert Keglar and Grafton Gray eventually lost their teaching contracts because of their civil rights involvement. Gray later died, but Robert Keglar has continued seeking information about his mother’s death. In 2004, he helped deliver FOIA requests to sheriffs in Tallahatchie and Leflore counties and later wondered if that was a good idea.

“I was visiting friends a few months later. When I came home, a friend who was housesitting asked if I knew a short man and a tall man who drove a pickup truck. They came to the door while I was gone and asked to see me. They wouldn’t leave their names or a card. I don’t think it was the FBI.”

On July 29, 2005, Hamlett’s granddaughter unexpectedly contacted Robert Keglar for help with her research. A Minnesota congressional representative promised to initiate an investigation if Nina Zachary could find more details. “I hadn’t spoken with Robert in many years and it was by chance that I picked up the telephone and was able to reach him. There were things I didn’t understand and he was able to help. There had also been some friction between the two families of Birdia Keglar and my grandmother. The two women had a strong agreement that if something happened to one of them, the other would tell both families everything that she knew.

“Grafton Gray did not honor this commitment. My parents tried many times to talk to him – he would cross the street to avoid them. Or he would tell them he could not talk or his wife, a school principal, would lose her job. Perhaps he was affected more greatly than they had recognized or he was terribly frightened. I guess he would have had no place to hide if he spoke out at the time.”

These deaths were part of a larger drama.

- In the same week that Vernon Dahmer, Birdia Keglar and Adeline Hamlet were killed, the Ku Klux Klan was under intensive investigation by the House Committee on Un-American activities or HUAC. The hearings opened at the end of 1965 and continued into the first months of 1966. As Klan representatives from around the country testified, there were cross burnings, lynchings, bombings and other activities taking place in each of their regions at the same time their members appeared before HUAC.

- The Mississippi Klan group was scheduled to appear before HUAC on January 13, 1966, the day after Dahmer's death and the Sidon incident. The United Klans of America had already dramatized its presence in Mississippi by burning over a hundred crosses throughout the state "less than two weeks after Christmas" in protest against HUAC's resumption of hearings on the Klan.^{xxii}

- The Ku Klux Klan increased activities in the Delta from 1964 to 1966, including the Hills region around Charleston and Greenwood, believe several persons from the region. Klansman and longtime Citizen's Council member, Byron De La Beckwith of Greenwood, who earlier murdered Medgar Evers, became a White Knight Kleagle or recruiter in August of 1965, and later joined the United Klans of America. Beckwith appeared before HUAC on January 13, 1966, as did Gordon Lackey of Greenwood, who earlier helped write the 40-page constitution of the White Knights, the state's most secret Klan organization.^{xxiii} John Winstead and Wesley Kersey, also of Greenwood, were active Klan members according to HUAC reports found in Sovereignty Commission files. Several residents of nearby Winona, Greenville, and Yazoo City were also listed as members of their respective Klaverns, according to an Associated Press reporter covering the hearings; hence, Klan activity in Mississippi was not limited to the Southern counties as it was (and is) so often reported.

- A story filed by the Associated Press appearing in the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* on October 31, 1965, about ten weeks before the Sidon incident, stated that FBI and Mississippi officers obtained in advance of the HUAC hearings, a "top-secret document" of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, "including a virtual guerilla warfare order." The document, a three-page report, was actually an executive order of the secretive White Knights and gave details about harassment of enemies, deception of the public, and instructions for burying firearms and ammunition in case of a "crack-down." The report named Klan members in both Tallahatchie and Leflore counties, including around Greenwood and Charleston. Klan members were also reported residing in Yazoo City, Shaw, and Greenville.^{xxiv}

- Two months before the Sidon incident, a Klan leaflet was distributed throughout the small cotton town "around November 18 [1965]," telling white people to get registered in order to "combat communists and liberals." The pamphlet, described in Sovereignty Commission files, also stated that Gov. Johnson and Senator Eastland were "too liberal" and should be voted out of office. The leaflet named 15 "liberals" and civil rights leaders including a local white man who served as a federal registrar. Also named were Mrs. Laura McGhee and sons Jake and Silas, Mr. Dewey Green, and known activist and union organizer Liz Fusco. Sidon had already been targeted that fall by the Klan as one of several small havens for Klansmen to settle into, according to related Sovereignty Commission reports.^{xxv}

- Finally, on the same day that Dahmer, Birdia Keglär and Adeline Hamlett were killed, J. Edgar Hoover for the first time ever visited the FBI's new Mississippi headquarters in Jackson for the grand opening. He was in Mississippi the day before the state's Ku Klux Klansmen were to testify in Washington, D. C.

Margaret Block learned of her friend's death several months after moving to California. "But I remember thinking right then she was probably murdered. She was a smart woman, a good strategist who usually knew if there was impending danger."^{xxvi}

Block had moved to the west coast, fearing her own life was in danger, and went on to graduate from San Francisco State University and the Pacific Union College in education to become a master teacher in San Francisco. She returned to the Delta after 22 years.

"I probably would have been in that car if I had been with Birdia that day," Block said. The two women became friends in the early 1960s after Block moved to Charleston as a SNCC volunteer to work voter registration in Tallahatchie County. Birdia Keglär once saved Block's life by quick thinking:

EIGHTEEN-YEAR-OLD Block was going door to door in Charleston handing out voting rights pamphlets. "People would see me coming and close the door. They were really afraid. It was much worse than Greenwood," where Block's brother Sam was working with SNCC,

"We were always very competitive. When Sam said he was going to Greenwood, I decided I'd do him one better by going to Charleston. Now when I think about it, that was not a very good idea."

Margaret Block had not worked long when a Klansman tried to kill her with a knife while she was working "right in front of the courthouse." She remembered being "pulled away quickly" by a Justice Department agent. "They usually didn't protect us. But he did, and I am grateful."

One day while handing out pamphlets downtown, "... a man came running up to me and said I needed to go to Birdia's office right away. She worked at a funeral home and when I got there, Birdia sneaked me away in the back of a hearse. Someone had called Birdia and warned her that the Klan was on the way to get me."

For several days Block hid out in a small cave near Keglär's house, "...until Charlie Cobb and Ivanhoe Donaldson – both Howard University students – came to pick me up." From there she was taken to Greenwood and then to the Brewer's farm near Glendora, also in Tallahatchie County, where she kept working the county until leaving for Jackson and finally California in 1966.

Block learned about the Klan from first hand experiences. She and others living at the farm once acted on a tip that Klan members would be coming out to kill them. Stokely Carmichael decided it would be best to take the offensive by preparing Molotov Cocktails that would be used to greet the Klansmen.

"I had never heard of a Molotov Cocktail before. When Stokely first mentioned it, I told him I couldn't have one because I didn't drink. He really fell apart over that, couldn't stop laughing, which was unusual for him, but he went ahead and showed us how to make them.

“He got the gas by draining it from tractors left out in the fields. Some of the other people had spotlights they dragged out into the cotton fields. When the Klansmen were spotted driving down the long, narrow road to the farm, we let them keep coming at us.

“They thought they were so smart because they had a big light to shine on us. But when they got really close, we shined our lights back on them from the side and from behind. We didn’t even have to use the Molotov cocktails – they remained stacked up behind the chicken coop – because the Klansmen got scared and ran when someone shot a gun in the air. The next day, the game warden came out to the farm. He said he’d had a complaint the day before that we were poaching deer. I had to laugh, to think this was the best the Klan could do.”^{xxvii}

ⁱ [A small story in the Leflore County newspaper, published in January 1966 in Greenwood and provided by the Leflore County District Attorney \(in 2004\), reported the deaths. No specific date was written on the clipping](#) itself. Two smaller stories appeared in the Jackson Clarion-Ledger.

ⁱⁱ Deb Riechmann, “Gov. Releases Committee Records,” *AP Online*, August 24, 2001. Byron de la Beckwith of Greenwood and Klan Imperial Wizard Sam Bowers of Laurel were among those called to testify before the committee; the probe was finally stopped when HUAC’s chief counsel, Ernest Adamson, announced the committee did not have enough data to investigate.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jared Taylor, “The many deaths of Viola Liuzzo - 1965 murder of civil rights worker,” *National Review*, July 10, 1995.

^{iv} *Ibid.* Taylor writes that later, as COINTELPRO was being investigated and after the death of J. Edgar Hoover, much was revealed about Rowe, a former bartender and nightclub bouncer. Investigations implicated him with helping plant the bomb that killed four black girls in a Birmingham church in 1963. In November 1978, a grand jury indicted Rowe for first-degree murder in the killing of Viola Liuzzo. And in 1980, while Rowe was fighting extradition, an internal FBI file came to light acknowledging that Rowe had led attacks on Freedom Riders, clubbing them with a lead-weighted baseball bat. The FBI paid Rowe’s medical bills and gave him a \$125 bonus. One of his FBI handlers said, “If he happened to be with some Klansmen and they decided to do something [violent] he couldn’t be an angel and be a good informant.”

^v Three page statement of Chairman Edwin E. Willis, HUAC, U. S. House of Representatives, November 9, 1965. From the archived papers of Aaron Henry.

^{vi} *Ibid.*

^{vii} Dittmer, 391.

^{viii} Facts on Dahmer’s murder come from articles appearing in several *Clarion-Ledger* newspapers written at the time of the incident.

^{ix} From an interview with Nina Black Zachary with Susan Klopfer by telephone on July 31, 2005.

^x Senator Kennedy must have been concerned about the Tallahatchie County civil rights volunteers. At the end of a meeting the the fall of 1965, after Birdia told her story he looked out into the audience and warned that she and the others had better make it home safely or someone would be answering to him. This story was recounted by Lucy Boyd, Birdia’s friend and head of the NAACP in Tallahatchie County.

^{xi} From separate interviews with Kegl’s son, Robert, in 2003 and 2004; with Kegl’s friend, Lucy Boyd, 2004 and 2005; and with Gray’s widow, 2004, who asked to remain anonymous “for my safety.” [Also this was confirmed by Alma Chism during an interview on May 1, 2005](#), and Grafton Gray’s niece, Gwen Dailey.

^{xii} [Telephone conversation with Alma Chism, by Susan Klopfer, May 1, 2005.](#)

^{xiii} Many attempts were made by this author to locate and speak to Simpson, but he could not be found.

^{xiv} Jessie Brewer lived in the Sharkay Community where he was a landowner and farmer.

^{xv} From a conversation with Gwen Dailey, June of 2005.

^{xvi} A relative by marriage to Bruce, Mrs. Jerry Bruce, told Susan Klopfer in July of 2005 by telephone that her brother-in-law died two years ago. “He never talked about the wreck. He was in the Greenwood hospital for some time because he had a head injury and could not remember anything from the event. I never knew, myself, any details.” Bruce was involved in several wrecks, one several years later causing him to lose a leg and only four months before the Sidon accident, his wife was killed in a car accident, leaving him with four small children, she said. Nina Black Zachery, the granddaughter of Adlena Hamlett, said in July of 2005 that her brother and mother tried to talk with Bruce in the hospital. “He was not receptive and clearly told them to leave. I don’t think that he was injured, at all.”

^{xvii} Conversation with Ed King, 2004.

^{xviii} Boyd said that years later she observed school kids at an athletic event waving a “Free State of Tallahatchie” sign. “I knew they had no idea what this meant. To them it was a joke. To us in the Civil Rights Movement, it meant *they* could do anything they wanted to us and be exonerated. *They* were immune to prosecution. A white man explained this to me once, and it was so true.

^{xix} Interview with Charles Sudduth, 2004, by Susan Klopfer.

^{xx} Conversation with Rev. Willie Blue, November 1, 2004, Charleston.

^{xxi} Ibid. [McGhee survived but McGhee’s entire family were victims of continued harassment. Their home was fired into and McGhee was once abducted by three white men who forced him into a car at gunpoint, took him to a plumbing shop, and beat him with a wooden board and pipe \(Dittmer, 277-278\).](#)

^{xxii} John Hall, “Over 100 Crosses Burned in State,” unidentified Mississippi newspaper article, 5 January 1966 Mississippi Sovereignty Commission documents SCR ID # 6-53-0-20-2-1-1; SCR ID # 6-53-0-46-1-1-1, SCR ID # 6-53-0-46-1-1-1 (names dozens of Mississippi klansmen); SCR ID # 6-53-0-21-1-1-1

^{xxiii} At one time, the White Knights had over 2,000 members in Southern Mississippi alone, and were led by Sam Bowers of Laurel. It was only after the 1966 HUAC hearings that Klan membership began to decline.

^{xxiv} Newspaper clipping, “Alleged Klan State Leaders Identified,” February 1966, Sovereignty Commission files, SCR ID # 6-53-0-31-1-1-1.

^{xxv} Sovereignty Commission report, Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party meeting, November 19, 1965, p.2, SCR ID # 6-61-0-9-2-1-1.

^{xxvi} Interview with Margaret Block by Susan Klopfer on March 14, 2005, in Cleveland. [Keglar’s son and several friends say the meeting also could have been a follow-up to an earlier hearing involving Sen. Robert Kennedy in the fall of 1965. “That time Sen. Kennedy looked out into the audience after Birdia spoke about her fight to vote and said she and the others had better make it home safely, or someone would be answering to him,” Boyd recalled.](#)

^{xxvii} [Conversation](#) with Margaret Block, April 9, 2005.